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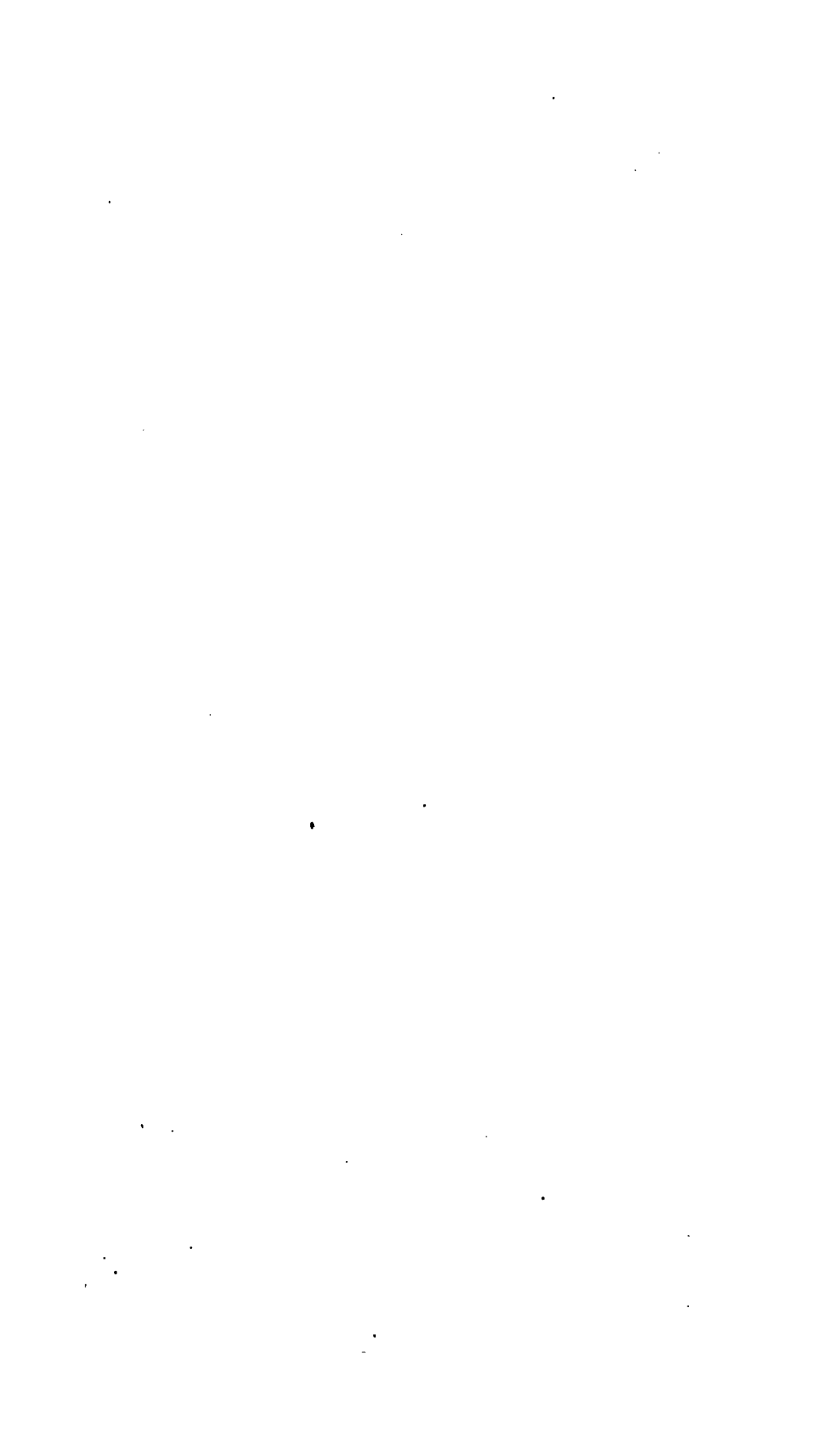
*Wm. G. Wirt*

A DISCOURSE  
ON THE  
LIFE AND CHARACTER  
OF  
WILLIAM WIRT.

22

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A

# DISCOURSE

ON THE

LIFE AND CHARACTER

OF

WILLIAM WIRT,

Late Attorney General of the United States;

PRONOUNCED AT THE REQUEST OF THE BALTIMORE BAR  
BEFORE THE CITIZENS OF BALTIMORE,

ON THE 20<sup>TH</sup> OF MAY, 1834,

*Delivered*  
BY JOHN P. KENNEDY.

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BALTIMORE:

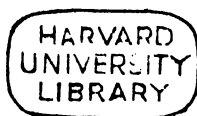
WILLIAM & JOSEPH NEAL.

1834.

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Entered, according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1834, by  
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THE following discourse was delivered in the presence of a large assemblage of the citizens of Baltimore, in the First Presbyterian church, on Tuesday evening the 20th of May, 1834. The death of Mr. Wirt occurred on the 18th of February previous, at the City of Washington, where his remains were deposited in the national cemetery, to which they were attended by a large concourse of the public functionaries and of the citizens of Washington. Amongst other manifestations of respect for the deceased, the Baltimore Bar, of which he was a prominent member, at a meeting held in the chamber of the County Court, on the 19th of February, adopted the following proceedings.

## BALTIMORE COUNTY COURT

June Term, 1834.

WEDNESDAY, 19th FEBRUARY.

The Court have heard the annunciation of the death of WILLIAM WIRT, a member of this Bar, with deep regret. His distinguished career at the Bar, and in the Executive Department of the Government, has made him known to the whole nation, while his literary labors have proved beneficial to the present generation, and will be read with profit and delight by succeeding generations as long as purity of morals are estimated, or classic beauty of style shall be a subject of admiration.

The Court will in respect for the memory of Mr. Wirt, direct an adjournment, and will further order this evidence of their high estimation of his services and capacity to be spread upon the minutes of the Court.

### TRIBUTE OF RESPECT.

At a meeting of the Judges of Baltimore County and City Courts, and of the members of the Bars of both Courts, held in the County Court Room, on Wednesday, the 19th instant, on motion of Colonel U. S. Heath, the Hon. STEVENSON ARCHER was called to the chair, and REVERDY JOHNSON, Esq. was appointed Secretary.

On motion of JOHN GLENN, Esq. the following resolutions were unanimously adopted:

*Resolved*, That it is with the most poignant grief the Bench and Bar of Baltimore County and City Courts have received the tidings of the death of WILLIAM WIRT:

That long endeared to him by professional as well as personalties, they feel that in his demise they have lost a brother whose character and fame have dignified and illustrated the profession, and whose private worth commanded the liveliest affections of the community in which he lived:

That richly gifted with the science of Jurisprudence, his attainments have contributed in an eminent degree to the service of his country:

That endowed with the most powerful eloquence, it has long and successfully been devoted to the support of right:

That stored with the various accomplishments of a profound and elegant scholar, they have been rendered subservient to the instruction and expansion of the public mind:

That imbued with the purest principles of virtue, of unbounded benevolence, charity and affection, bland and courteous in his manners, and fraught with the loftiest sentiments of honor—that honor “which felt a stain like a wound,” he gave an example in private life that improved and exalted the manners of the society around him—and

That impressed with the devout zeal of a christian, whose faith rested on the conclusions of a mind earnest and dispassionate in its contemplations, and firm and unwavering in its practice of the divine precepts, he afforded an eminent example to all who sought to attain the great ends of existence.

*Resolved*, That as a testimony of the sorrow of this meeting, they will wear the usual badges of mourning for the remainder of the Term.

*Resolved*, That John P. Kennedy, Esq. be appointed to deliver a public address commemorative of the character and virtues of the deceased, on some early day after the commencement of the next Term.

*Resolved*, That a Committee of three be appointed on the part of this Bench and Bar, to procure a suitable tablet dedicated to the memory of the deceased, to be set up in the room of the County Court, and that the said Committee be likewise directed to communicate to the family of the deceased, the condolence of this meeting in the unhappy bereavement they have sustained.

The Chair appointed Messrs. Glenn, Heath and Johnson, the Committee to carry into effect the object of the last resolution.

*Resolved*, That the Secretary cause the proceedings of this meeting to be published in the several newspapers of the city.

STEVENSON ARCHER, *Chairman*.

REVERDY JOHNSON, *Secretary*.

To the friends of the distinguished individual  
whose life and character are here attempted to be  
portrayed, and to the citizens of the United States  
generally, this discourse is respectfully inscribed  
by THE AUTHOR.

*Baltimore, June 4, 1834.*

## DISCOURSE.

IT is the custom of the world to count that a melancholy occasion which is dedicated to the remembrance of the dead. The melancholy, at least, is not unmingled with emotions of pleasure: it is grateful to the mind to call up to the glass of memory the features of the departed, that we may scan them when sober meditation has purified our passions, and when thoughts of rivalry may no longer disturb our judgment. Such retrospects chasten and temper our natures and overcome that fear of death which the ordinary currents of opinion, the habitudes of our lives and the common lessons of worldly education all tend too cogently to fortify and confirm. Incongruous as it may seem to a rational mind, we are accustomed to tremble at the thought that mortal man should die. This is the error of a sickly world, the off-



spring of a coward conscience. The realms beyond the grave are peopled with tribes that wisdom, affection and virtue need not regret to join. Thither, since creation's dawn, have repaired, without one backward step, the innumerable crowds whose little interests and earnest toils have ever made this orb a wondrous theatre of life and passion. Thither all complexions, natures and tempers have hurried with inevitable haste,—the wise, the brave, the beautiful; the stately crowned king and the unfurnished beggar; the calm sage and the impetuous slave of ambition; meek-eyed maiden, anxious matron and lisping child; chieftain and clansman, conqueror and conquered, saint and sinner. Alike has that path been journeyed by the scholar overborne by the wealth of science; by the restless minion of pride, with the pent fires of a soul that disdained companionship; and by the mild and pensive and lowly spirits that once deemed earth too proud to bear them: all have been borne along upon a never-ebbing tide to the deep and illimitable ocean of eternity. As surely as that doomed tide shall flow, so surely shall we, in our turn, glide on its swift current and join the various throng that have

floated out upon the vast deep. Is it fit that an upright man should be afraid? Death is all around us: he walks on every highway; he whispers in every breeze; he lodges under every roof-tree: he is our familiar household spirit; revels with us in our cups; sleeps in our bed and dashes his condiments into our pottage.—Is it wise that our lives should be so ordered as to breed in us a fear of him?—He is a faithful monitor that walks beside us to teach us how to live; the poor man's friend; the rich man's patron; the comforter and refuge of the captive, who unbars the dungeon's bolts and sets its prisoner free; the nurse of the weary and sick at heart, for whom he spreads a grateful couch and "steeps the senses in forgetfulness." Why should he be counted that hideous and unwelcome thing that makes men shudder? To him who pure of life and conscious of duty faithfully performed, death is but a serious companion that has no frown upon his brow; and as time wanes and the term of the wayfarer's journey is in sight, death beckons to his cheerful guest as a hospitable host invites an exhausted traveller.—Why should he fear?

Yet sorrow rises on the heart and must have its way. To the good and the wise it is a natural emotion and has its privileges: to them, however, it is only sorrow, not fear.— For a departed friend our regrets are seemly badges of respect. They betoken pain at being separated from one who was affined to our affections by strong endearment and are, therefore, tributes to the worth of the person who has left us: they are scarcely less poignant when we lose a cherished companion, who has gone upon a far adventure to pass many years in distant climes. It is the thought of broken intercourse, more than of dissolution, that brings anguish to the religious mind.

When a great man dies this regret spreads itself over a wider circle. He who has lived for his country; whose thoughts, words and actions have been earnest to do good in his generation; whose faculties for beneficence were large and efficient; who, in his outgoings and comings-in and in his abiding, has taught mankind the true philosophy of happiness; whose patient toil has elevated the condition of his species; who has protected the weak and sheltered the humble and rebuked the oppressor; who has sweetened the bitterness

of fortune to many; who has calmed the fears of many; who has brought merit out from the shade and put it in the genial light; whose name is connected with benefactions and remembered in the orisons of thousands—that man is both great and good, and his grave will be moistened with the tears of a nation. A narrower fold will enclose those in whose bosoms a deeper grief will abide when they remember that the seat of an affectionate friend is vacant. And still, within a holier precinct, there will be clustered around a domestic hearth those whose sorrow, sharp and too profound for the voice of comfort, shall find its vent only in salt tears and racking sobs and bitter lamentation. Yet it is separation only, not fear, that conjures up this general emotion: it is the thought of parting that sets in motion that strong flood of feeling which overbears and masters the vulgar dread of death.

There are many topics of mere worldly consolation that may be addressed to the sorrow of those who bewail the departure of a good man. Such grief has its commutation and its recompense. The man departs, but his virtues live after he is gone. He who has studied by the aim

and practice of his life to give an example to his species of an upright, faithful and just citizen; who has applied eminent talents to active services in his country's cause; who has, on all occasions, illustrated the right and condemned the wrong; who has borne himself through the giddy-paced strife of human passions and through the contentions and excitements that have embittered man against his fellow, with so winning, calm and amiable a behavior as to moderate the tempest of unruly will and inspire mutual forbearance and charity—that man's death deprives his country of his smallest part. The memory lives and in it a volume of virtues which, for generations to come, shall instruct, improve and strengthen the public good. It is only when his career is done that his name and character become the peculiar possession of his country. Death buries in oblivion the envy of his competitors, and gives to the history of his life that usefulness which belongs only to the tried and approved standards of practical virtue. The good works of such a man scarcely begin to be felt in the short span of his own existence; but time matures and confirms them, and adapts them to the habits and

feelings of the new generations that grow up to enjoy them.—Such is the happy destiny of the patriot's labors, and thus does the patriot's name grow to be the boast and glory of distant times!—

The same individual in the relations of private life, if he has enlivened and embellished the intercourse of friendship, warmed up the domestic affections, quickened the charities of social commerce; if he has taught friends and neighbors the practice of moral and christian duty, and enlarged their estimate of the courtesies and kindnesses of life; if he has assuaged anger; repressed envy; promoted toleration of opinion, content and cheerfulness; encouraged the lowly to enterprises of good; restrained the impetuous from tendencies to ill; made men love innocence and simplicity of heart; if he has smoothed, refined and elevated the temper of society around him,—he has done that which death will not undo. His friends and neighbors will remember him, who has wrought this good, with a still kinder memory when he is gone; and both the remembered precepts and example will rise upon their hearts with a mellowed lustre when sorrow has cast its shadows upon them. His

children will recall, with an earnest and devout enthusiasm, the familiar knowledge of their father's worth; they will cherish and emulate his fame, and seek, through the same honorable road, to win the same esteem. The minutest lessons of his wisdom will come back upon their minds like the treasured pictures of childhood; and the influences of his character, preserved in the affections of his family, will fall around them with the freshness of the dews of heaven upon the morning flowers.—His wife, alas!—the only hopeless sufferer—will remember all his gentleness and all his virtue with a proud pain that human consolation cannot reach. From her, the ear in which the holiest confidence was breathed, the heart upon which was laid her most secret affections, the tongue that spoke what no other tongue might utter—these from her are gone, and friendship, fame and fortune supply but ineffective substitutes. Her grief is sacred and alone, of all the world, without its earthly recompense. To God, who respects a broken heart, and who endues the stricken spirit with patience to bear the extremes of this world's chances, she may turn as to her only yet most sufficient refuge;

and even turning there her affliction will find a broader hope, and her vision will be quickened by a clearer light derived from her husband's earnest faith and the well-remembered precepts of his piety.

We are called together, on the present occasion, to contemplate the life and character of such a man as I have described. The recent death of William Wirt has thrown our confederacy into mourning; and it was in the first burst of a natural and most sincere emotion of grief that it was resolved, by the Baltimore Bar, that something more than the ordinary tribute of respect should be bestowed upon the exalted virtue of one who, whatever might be the claims of his country at large, was more especially allied to this fraternity, by ties of intimate companionship and close professional connection. In the discharge of this duty it is now my province to appear before this community. All that personal affection for the deceased or large esteem for his worth might bring to such a task, is mine to offer: I am conscious I bring little else to recommend the selection made by my professional brethren, of the individual entrusted with the expression of their feelings



parentage. His father was a Swiss, his mother a German; and at a very tender age he was left an orphan upon the world,—his mother, who had survived her husband, having died when he was but eight years old. He inherited a scant patrimony which, by the thrift of a frugal uncle, Mr. Jasper Wirt, was employed in giving him the rudiments of so much of a classical education as the meagre opportunities of our country, at that time, afforded. The epoch of his birth was the eighth of November, near four years before the declaration of independence. His boyhood, therefore, witnessed those tempestuous times that marked the greatest struggle for national liberty recorded in the annals of history. He was too young to be a partaker in the action of those scenes, though it is scarcely to be supposed that with his observant and susceptible mind—even in infancy a subject of remark amongst those who knew him—he did not imbibe somewhat of that peculiar tone of feeling which belonged to the “plain living and high thinking men” of the Revolution. A familiar conversancy with the principles of human liberty, a stern and uncompromising love of country that did not spend itself in


profession so much as it broke forth into daily action, frugal habits of life, ignorance of luxury and contempt for frivolous manners, little application to the arts of growing rich, and large commingling in public affairs, brave submission to misfortune, patience in privation, and a quick sense of national wrong were the distinguishing traits of that day of strife, and were the common household virtues of the people of these states. This complexion of character was, in its due proportion, infused into old and young; and it must occur to those who have studied the survivors of these times, that, up to the latest period of their lives, they almost invariably have retained, through all the changes of present society, some distinct traces of the character I have imputed to the era of the Revolution. In Mr. Wirt these early influences were continually breaking forth above the mass of new habits, and showing the direction of that strong under-current which flowed at the bottom of his thoughts. His writings are full of that devotion to public virtue and of that attachment to country which, in the former day, were even more of a passion than they were a principle, and which now, alas! seem to be overtrodden in the restless pursuit of private ends,—and, in the more

artificial and voluptuous cast of manners, forgotten or despised.

It is pleasant to look back to the early stages of life in the history of men who have arrived at great eminence, that we may endeavor to discern the first flickering of that light which afterwards spread around so broad a radiance, and that we may contrast the young germs of power in the infant with their subsequent development. There is a charm in the days of childhood which always makes them a pleasant subject of contemplation: their unheeded ramblings, their thoughtless jollity, their innocence invest them with a certain poetical freshness in the musings of manhood. They have the verdure of the spring, and resemble the smooth surface of the mead, where every blade of grass and every useful plant and every noxious weed shoots up with the same tenderness of fibre and the same liveliness of hue, and all look fresh and healthful. The growth of a ripper season discriminates the good from the bad, the useful from the worthless, and furnishes that wide variety of character which is perceptible to the most careless glance.

The subject of our present discourse was,

at the age of seven years, removed from beneath the shelter of his maternal roof to be initiated in the first mysteries of letters. The place of his migration was Georgetown, then a thriving village at no great distance from the cottage in which he was born,—they might both be seen from the summit of a neighboring hill. To him, however, it was a weary length of way; and, as he was wont to describe it himself, it was with a full heart and a desolate sense of forlornness that he found himself separated, for the first time, from those who constituted all the world to him. But use is a plastic artist on the mould of a school-boy's temper, and soon brought him to be familiar with his exile. The beautiful heights of Georgetown were the accustomed scenes of his early sports, and from these eminences he often cast his wistful glance towards his native village which, some eight miles remote, lay in the bosom of the hills that bounded the eastern horizon. He was, even at that early period, distinguished for his playful temper, his shrewd apprehension, and for his imaginative mind; and I can fancy with what transport the young votary of the reluctant rites of Cadmus, during the period of this



banishment, hailed the approach of the holiday that was to bless him with the enjoyment of a short return to the humble mansion of his mother. I can fancy him setting out, on the long-expected day, on that homeward journey and wending his way towards the village on the Anacosta. Some three miles on that route he had to climb a steep ascent, which having gained, I can imagine with what rapture, even in the eagerness of his holiday spirits, he stopped to look around him on the fair landscape: that here, with that quick eye for beauty, and that soul to drink inspiration at the high altars of the gorgeous temple of Nature, his sight was charmed with the rich and enchanting prospect that broke upon it. There he might discern the calm and majestic Potomac glittering, like a broad lake, in the midst of green fields and native groves, and sweeping towards the ocean with its ample flood, in smooth and placid dignity; whilst the frequent bark and the yet rare and stately ship threw their white sails against the deep green forest, and enlivened the tranquil scene with the animation of an infant commerce.— Upon that rich mirror of the waters did he see reflected the sylvan pictures of the land

with "woody hill o'er hill encompassed round." There, too, he might discern, far off, the western hills showing their bold crags through which the river had shot its way to meet the tide. From this same height he might look down the abrupt descent upon a level plain, where "for many a rood" there lay beneath his eye varied field and pasture, and occasional reliques of the forest far across, until it terminated on the margin of the wide water. This plain, more beautiful from its contrast with the encompassing hills, that in gentle slopes or in sudden crags begirt its border, itself presented a scene to catch the boy's delighted eye. The lowing herds that, at summer evening, trooped across its surface; the embowered streamlet that crept amongst its coverts; the slow team that labored under the burden of the full harvest; the long shadows thrown athwart the verdant meadow; the circling night-hawk that darted in swift evolutions above it in quest of prey; and, far along its western confine, the burnished gold of sunset illumining the river with tints more lovely than the poet's enchantment flings around "the realms of faëry,"—all these images then rose on the young observer's eye

with a witchery that every added year in the progress to manhood robbed of some of its potency. How little did the tyro then dream, that on this very spot where he halted to indulge his sight, an imperial dome, splendid as the palace of the Cæsars, was in after-times to arise and spread its broad foundations over the summit of the hill!—that its magnificent terrace and its trophied pillar, rich with the records of the heroism of an unborn republic, were to look forth over that pastoral plain, and down upon a city whose avenues, in the life time of the gazer, should be crowded with the functionaries of an empire whose wings should reach from the St. Lawrence to the Gulf of Mexico, and whose body expand from the Atlantic to the far and illimitable West! How little did he imagine that in that sculptured Capitol, he himself,—the wayward schoolboy with no higher thought than to make rude music on a rustic reed—should, in the pride of his manhood, be clothed with one of the most honorable functions of the republic, to which, eminent as it might be, his genius should impart its richest grace! that in the halls of that Capitol the throng of citizens should press to witness the triumphs

of his mind and hang entranced upon his words, whose eloquent melody should enthral every heart, and sway, with undisputed authority, the learned, the wise and the good! How little did he think, that in the thick covert of the wood, visible from the same spot, after a life of desirable length, spent in honorable toil and crowned with the applause of all whose good opinion virtuous ambition might covet,—after he had seen an affectionate progeny grow up around him,—when all his wanderings had ceased, his race been won and the noble prize in his hand—how little did he, the thoughtless, cheerful boy, dream that in that quiet nook his honored bones were to be laid, amongst departed worthies, with all the chief dignitaries of the nation to attend his bier! If propitious Destiny herself had invited him to choose a place of rest and appoint the time and manner of his repose, could he have chosen one more grateful to his temper and his feelings than this which she has given him?—There, after a long absence and amid many vicissitudes of fortune; having for many years,—and, as he might have deemed, forever quit his native state; formed new friendships and planted deep affections



in another soil—there, by mere accident, he had returned a casual visiter, and after an interval of more than half a century, has been borne to his rest amongst the illustrious servants of the republic, in the nation's cemetery, whose precincts may be seen from the same hill-top that looks down upon his natal cottage. Happy man! Rich in the treasures of a splendid name, rich in the affections of his country, rich in the memory of his manly virtues, and even richer still in the recollections that cluster around his tomb!—

After one year passed at this school in Georgetown, the death of his mother threw him upon the guardianship of his uncle, and he was soon afterwards removed to an academy in Charles county, under the superintendence of Mr. Dent. Here he remained for three years, and, at the age of eleven, was again transferred to a school of some note in Montgomery county, kept by a very worthy Presbyterian clergyman, the Rev. James Hunt, with whom he continued to prosecute his studies until 1787, when the school was broken up. It was a peculiar advantage to the young scholar that Mr. Hunt was a gentleman of a liberal and accomplished mind, of

agreeable powers of conversation and imbued with a good taste in literature. The influence of these qualities was soon conspicuously seen upon his pupil. The preceptor had a good library to which the student had access, and at this fountain he first drank of the waters whose flavor may be found infused into so many of the best exhibitions of his genius in after years. It is curious to observe how the predominating colors of the mind first begin to show themselves in early life. Mr. Wirt was both an orator and a writer, and a chief beauty in his performances, in either character, was a certain classical fecundity of illustration, in which was displayed both the graceful wit and easy, effortless style of the best English writers of the period of Queen Ann. His imagination dwelt with most pleasure upon the pictures furnished by the ancient classics, and gave many evidences of its training in the school that formed Addison and Pope:—indeed he may justly be called the Addison of America. Under the roof of Mr. Hunt his studies were chiefly directed to the literature of the period to which I have referred. They were stealthily pursued with that fervor which always marks the addictedness of a

sprightly mind when allowed to consult its own instincts; and as these pursuits were indulged, in some degree, at the expense of his ordinary scholastic duties and in the face of the preceptor's interdict, they grew upon the affection of the student with a more indelible impression, and became, like bread eaten in secret, of a sweeter flavor to the palate. At the age of thirteen he aspired to the character of the author, being prompted, as it is told of him, by emulation of Pope who began "to lisp in numbers" at twelve. Like the subject of his rivalry our schoolboy's first effort was in verse: he soon, however, discovered that the Muses were not propitious and fortunately betook himself to prose, to which he adhered for the rest of his life, and in which he won no small celebrity even while yet in leading strings at school. I mention these trivial circumstances merely because they show the eager ply of his mind, and enable us to trace out one of the sources of that reputation which afterwards became so brilliant.

His passion for oratory was not much behind his zeal for composition. He was a successful declaimer at this period; and an inci-

dent occurred, whilst he was under the care of Mr. Hunt, that furnished a prognostic of his future occupations. The magnetism of genius is infallible in giving its direction to the needle whenever the attracting matter is brought near enough to exert its influence. The school was within a few miles of the court house of the county. On one occasion Mr. Hunt permitted his boys to attend the session of the court. In this rustic temple of Themis the future attorney general of the United States first caught the spark that fired his genius. He witnessed an animated and sharply contested trial with so engrossed and delighted a spirit, that immediately upon his return to school, he proposed to his comrades the establishment of a mock forum resembling the real one they had visited, as much as their crude knowledge of legal forms enabled them to make it; and he, the leader in the scheme, prepared a constitution and system of government for the little tribunal. On this theatre he subsequently made frequent essays which, doubtless, were characterised by all the vivacity and energy, if not by the acumen and learning which distinguished his

later displays before the Supreme Court of the United States.

By the time he had reached his fifteenth year the school had closed. His patrimony was now spent, and the world was before him, a helpless lad, armed only with a lively temper and good store of scholarly acquirements. His playful manners, his frank and ingenuous disposition and manly qualities had made him friends whithersoever he had gone. Amongst these some became distinguished at a later period, and ever recognized, with a peculiar satisfaction, these early alliances. His preceptors had always regarded him with strong affection, and many predictions had been made of future renown in behalf of a youth who had pursued his boyish path with so upright a temper and with such laudable assiduity. Though an orphan, therefore, and literally penniless, he was not without riches in that good name which is better than house and land. Silver and gold take wings unto themselves and flee away, or, what is worse, they benumb the faculties of the young with that most mischievous of diseases, indolence, and leave the canker of idleness to eat into the mind just at that period when education

should be busy to strengthen it for future toils: the day of self-dependence is then too apt to arrive at the very time when the disarmed and unprovided man is not only weak in his destitution, but weak also in his intrinsic capabilities. The resources of a good name and of sound education, on the contrary, are ever present to supply expedients against misfortune, and to lift up the individual to new and valuable acquisitions of comfort.—So fared it with William Wirt.

Amongst his school-fellows at Mr. Hunt's, was Ninian Edwards, not long since a member of the Senate of the United States, and afterwards Governor of Illinois. The father of this gentleman, Mr. Benjamin Edwards, lived at that time in Montgomery county, and had accidentally seen the "Constitution" of the school-boy court, which so favorably attracted his attention as to induce him to invite the author to a residence in his own family, in the capacity of a private tutor to his son Ninian and two nephews who were preparing themselves for college. Mr. Wirt cheerfully accepted the invitation and remained in the family of this gentleman something short of two years.

Benjamin Edwards was a man of vigorous mind, of enlarged conversation with the world, of solid principles and of great moral worth. He was moreover, a patriot deeply imbued with genuine American feelings. Under the auspices of such a man our student could not but be advantageously impressed with the value of the high attributes of character with which he was brought into daily commerce. He was wont to expatiate with an affectionate interest upon these influences over his mind, and to ascribe to them a large share in the direction which his character received towards that earnest devotion of his faculties to the useful aims of life by which he was distinguished.


In this situation he had a favorable opportunity to extend his studies into an ample range of classical literature, and frequently to employ his pen in those exercises that contributed to give it the polish and force which was so conspicuous in his writings.

I leave to the biographer of Mr. Wirt to enlarge upon the details of his life. My office is to select such prominent points in it as may illustrate his character, by showing the

more controlling agencies that shaped its course.

He had already chosen his profession and first began to study law at Montgomery court house under William P. Hunt, the son of his early friend and tutor: these studies were completed with Mr. Thomas Swann, but a short time since, the attorney for the District of Columbia. In the autumn of 1792, being yet but twenty years of age, he removed to Culpepper in Virginia, where he obtained his first admission to the Bar. In little more than two years after this date he had acquired a fair practice and had won rapidly upon the public estimation as a man destined to honorable eminence.

He had the good fortune at this period to gain the regard of a distinguished gentleman of Albemarle, Dr. George Gilmer, whose daughter Mildred he married in the year 1795. Dr. Gilmer, besides being an eminent physician was a scholar of high repute, and remarkable for his various attainments in classical literature. With this gentleman, at his residence at Pen Park, Mr. Wirt now took up his abode. Here he found himself surrounded by the attractions of a polished





society and brought into intimate companionship with some of the most conspicuous men of the day. Amongst these were Mr. Jefferson, Mr. Madison and Mr. Monroe, with whom he formed friendships that were never severed but by death, and which were frequently signalized by the lavish offer of honors, from each of the individuals named, when the suffrages of the nation had successively elevated them to the Chief Magistracy. Here, too, he found friends whose influence over his character and fortunes was, perhaps, not less signal, than that of the illustrious personages I have mentioned;—I mean in the well-stored library of his father-in-law. There did he enjoy a silent communion with the spirits of the immortal fathers of English learning, whose imperishable wisdom, condensed in volumes of philosophy, transfused into his mind their own rich essence, and made him familiar with the vast world of thought. Barrow and Tillotson, Hooker, Bacon and Locke, and all that class of nervous writers who have laid the massive foundations of the literature of our language, became his favorite studies; and with what success they were cultivated may have often been recognized by

Mr. Wirt's audience in the strong and appropriate diction, and in the logical precision which gave the substance and complexion to his oratory.

In the year 1799, a severe domestic affliction, in the loss of his wife, gave a new turn to his fortunes. The House of Delegates of Virginia elected him, in the following winter, to the post of their clerk, a situation which had been previously filled by some of the most prominent men of the state. This post he was induced to accept, as it furnished employment and change of scene to him, at a time when his feelings, torn by his late bereavement, required the antidote of busy life against their own poignancy. He remained in this station for two years, practising law in the intervals of his official vocation. At the end of this term, so favorably had he impressed the Legislature with his ability, he was honored by that body with an unsolicited and most unexpected appointment as Chancellor of the Eastern district of the Commonwealth. The duties of this responsible and elevated post required that he should reside at Williamsburg. He did not, however, long occupy his seat upon the bench; for in the fall of

1802, having married the daughter of Colonel Gamble of Richmond, a lady of extraordinary merit and cultivation,—his present suffering widow,—he soon afterwards resigned his chancellorship and, at the close of 1803, removed to Norfolk, where he resumed the assiduous pursuit of his profession.

At this era of his life, being now about thirty-two years of age, we have to date his first appearance before the world in the character of an author. Just before he removed to Norfolk he wrote, more for recreation than for fame, the little volume of the "Letters of the British Spy," which first appeared in the Richmond Argus, and which being subsequently collected have, very much against the original calculation of their author, given him a wide literary renown,—their popularity being tested by as many as ten editions.

His success at Norfolk, though he was called into rivalry with many of the acutest and most powerful minds of his profession, was such as to place him, in the estimation of all men, amongst the most distinguished of the Bar. In 1806 he took up his residence at Richmond, and in the succeeding year was engaged, by the orders of his friend Mr. Jef-

person, then President of the United States, to aid the Government attorney in the celebrated prosecution of Aaron Burr. The fame won by him in this endeavor is still fresh in the memory of all who knew him. His speech, on that occasion, attained a reputation which, for a long time, made it a theme for the declamation of the schools, and aroused the public interest towards him in a degree that ever afterwards rendered him one of the most observed and admired advocates of this nation.

From this time Mr. Wirt has lived so much in the public gaze as to render it necessary to say but little of his career.

In 1816 he was appointed, by Mr. Madison, the attorney of the United States for the District of Virginia, and, in the following year, by Mr. Monroe, Attorney General of the Government of the Union, a post which he continued to occupy, with distinguished ability, through the terms of Mr. Monroe and his successor, Mr. Adams, until the year 1829.

His position at Washington, as Attorney General, first brought him into contact with the Baltimore Bar, at which, during the term

of his office, he was a constant practitioner; and from the date of his resignation until the period of his death he was a resident of this city.

It is remarkable in the history of Mr. Wirt that, with the most fervent public spirit and the most generous love of country, with talents eminently adapted to the sphere of political life, his ambition never seems to have been dazzled with the lustre of political renown. Although often urged to enter upon the theatre of politics, and tempted by the most flattering promises both from the people and those highest in their confidence, amongst whom, especially, may be named Mr. Jefferson, he never could be prevailed upon to turn aside from the road he had marked out for himself in professional life. On one occasion, alone, do we find him, even for a moment, seduced from the determined pursuit of his own appropriate path. Whilst a resident of Richmond, in 1808, he consented to take an election to the House of Delegates of Virginia, where he served but a single session, speedily betaking himself back to the bosom of the Bar, from which he never again departed.

In this rapid biographical sketch which I

have thought it proper to the occasion to bring into review, I have extracted the principal materials from a memoir, published but a few years since, from the pen of one of our own fraternity, now no more.\* I claim, in making this acknowledgment, to be indulged with the privilege of a passing tribute to the memory of a very dear friend, around whose bier, had I been present, it would have been my melancholy duty to scatter the memorials of affection. He was swept away in the pride and vigor of manhood by that ruthless pestilence which, not yet two years past, spread desolation over many a glad household, and dismay and terror through this land. Gifted with a mind of exquisite beauty, and with a heart as honest as the light of day, he had cultivated, with an earnest and simple devotion, the refinements of scholarship and the delicacies of moral feeling, until his whole character became one of polished and unspotted transparency. To him even inelegance was a vice, and a want of grace

\* Peter H. Cruse, a gentleman of distinguished literary accomplishment, a good writer, scholar and poet, who fell a victim to the cholera in Baltimore, on the 7th of September, 1832.

almost a want of virtue. Truth had for him a captivation that no imagery could rival, and nature was a deity that his soul adored with a fervid and enthusiastic worship. I knew him long, and every secret of his bosom knew, and can say that there never sat enthroned within a human breast a spirit of more undeviating rectitude, of kinder or warmer impulses, of more unstained honor, or of more genuine and self-forgetting attachments. He has departed! alas, too soon for his own fame, which, if Heaven had spared him but the ordinary space of the life of man, would have broken forth upon the world expanded and embellished by the painfully hoarded treasures of thought which, through many an hour of secret toil and unwearied study, he was laying up for future use!

From the pen of such a man has the world been put in possession of the incidents of William Wirt's life. To that memoir I refer all who would more intimately learn the vicissitudes through which the subject of our remembrance pursued his way up that plain upon whose highest stage is erected the tomb that now guards his dust.

Mr. Wirt's literary efforts were not as numerous as his country, perhaps, had a right to claim of him.

In 1812, he published "The Old Bachelor," a series of essays somewhat after the manner of Addison, which first appeared in the *Richmond Enquirer*. Although several of these essays are from other hands, the principal and greater number are Mr. Wirt's. They were rapidly and, without derogation it may be said, sometimes carelessly written, evidently exhibiting more a purpose to amuse the writer than to enhance his reputation. Their popularity, however, like that of the *British Spy*, has borne them through several editions. He had previously published some papers vindicating Mr. Madison's claims to the Presidency, under the signature of "One of the People," which discussions, although, at the date of their appearance, sufficiently striking to attract an extensive commendation from the public, were of too temporary a character to be preserved in a more durable form than that in which they first came before the world.

The life of Patrick Henry was published in 1817. This was an undertaking of a



character more compatible with the reputation of its author; and the design of it had been long cherished by him, as something not only due to his country, but also, in a certain sense, due to the place that he held in the affections of the State which he had chosen for his home. Unfortunately the author was not allowed the leisure necessary for the accurate accomplishment of a work of such philosophical pretensions. The multiplying and distracting engagements of professional life are sadly adverse to elaborate and perfect literary enterprise; and this work, in some degree, shares the character of Mr. Wirt's previous exhibitions. It was given to the world, at last, under all the disadvantages of a hurried labor completed in circumstances the least auspicious to its success. It is still, however, a beautiful tribute of regard from an adopted son of Virginia to his foster-parent, and lymns, with a bold and enchanting pencil, the portrait of one of the noblest and most glorious of the children of that modern "Mother of the Gracchi."—

In the catalogue of Mr. Wirt's literary productions I must not fail to mention some occasional addresses made by him at intervals

when invited by public appointment to such efforts. Amongst these are conspicuous for the beauty of their composition and the manly and nervous cast of thought, "A Discourse on the Lives and Characters of Thomas Jefferson and John Adams," delivered by him, at Washington, in October, 1826,—“An address delivered before the Students of Rutgers’s college, in New Jersey, in July, 1830,” and the Oration pronounced by him, in this city, in October of the same year, on the occasion of the celebration of the “Three days Revolution in France.” These three productions, the exhibitions of a mind ripened by experience, brought forth in the midst of incessant professional application and, I may add, written at a stage of his life in which disease had already made sad inroads upon his constitution, present him in a very favorable light to the public. The first is one of the most masterly effusions that our literature can boast of. It is distinguished throughout by the mellow and golden lights of his genius, and never has been surpassed for vigor by any previous attempt of his strongest day; while its style is chastened and polished by that taste which, up to the latest hour of his

life, seemed to be ever acquiring a new delicacy. There are passages in this oration that will long be preserved amongst the most classical and graphic sketches that belong to the rich stock of our language. The subject was well fitted to draw out the sweetest notes of his musical fancy. The almost miraculous and incredible incident of the death of the two patriarchs of American liberty, on the fourth of July, in the midst of a celebration of the national jubilee under circumstances of peculiar emphasis, at the end of exactly half a century from the era of the country's freedom, during which these venerable men had seen the people they had established grown to be a master-state amongst the powers of the earth;—themselves the only survivors of the committee, who reported the Declaration of Independence fifty years before; one of them the very penman of that instrument; both of them, in turn, Presidents of the Republic, the respective leaders of the two great adverse parties of the nation: both men of surpassing ability, and crowned with the glories of a brilliant fame in the Old World no less than in the New; high seated upon the pinnacles of human greatness where posterity

long shall turn its eye upon them; both sages and statesmen, than whom history has not told of any more noted for the work they have done in that most magnificent of human labors, the founding of free empires. To these characteristics may be added, that they were not more eminent for public service, than they were hallowed in the public affections by a length of days far beyond the common lot of man,—each bending, though not oppressed, beneath the sunshine of more than eighty summers; and, what was the most enchanting feature in their later history, each pursuing his tottering march down the decline of life with calm and philosophic contentment, filled with amiable care for the posterity they had blessed, and—all rivalries long forgotten—in cheerful correspondence with each other. That two such men, several hundred miles remote, should take their departure from earth on the same day,—and that day so distinguished in the calendar of the nation, and so peculiarly their own festival—amidst the joyous reverberations of artillery, the ringing of bells and the shouts of a people rejoicing on the birth-day of their freedom, seemed, as the author himself described it, more like the visible translation

of prophets than the common doom of men. These circumstances presented to the orator a splendid field for the display of that vivid and racy eloquence which he so well knew how to employ. In addition to these, Mr. Jefferson was his personal friend, early patron and adviser, one of whom Mr. Wirt never spoke but in terms of endearment and fond regard. Whatever of rich, harmonious and cogent discourse, these considerations might be expected to produce, may be found in the oration. It has a tone of sober wisdom above which rises a note of enthusiastic remembrance and glowing sentiment, and over the whole is cast the polish and lustre of an accurate and highly-trained scholarship.

The address to the students of Rutger's College is of a different class of oratory. It is the tempered, calm and sedate exhortation of age addressing its wisdom to the heart of generous youth. It almost conjures up to the reader the figure of a good man, in the vale of years, laying his hand, with old-fashioned precision, upon the head of his children, and giving them the blessing that was to guard their steps amongst the walks of

wily men: unambitious of ornament, it speaks in the plain language of Mentor to the young Telemachus with a voice of gentle admonition, and it bears the thoughtful and majestic front of solid usefulness. This oration will be preserved with reverent fondness, for many a year to come, by the successive pupils of that school where it was pronounced, and, I trust, by many thousands of the future youth of America,—and will thus transfuse into coming generations the noble and upright spirit in which it was conceived.

The last of the three addresses I have mentioned, was heard by many persons who are now present. It was uttered with all the fire that signalized the early manhood of its author, and seemed as if it sprang out of a rejuvenescence of his character. It is warm, devoted and earnest in its patriotism, and shows with what enthusiasm and delight the speaker could re-summon that glad spirit of liberty which, in the exciting times of his earlier career, took possession of his soul and caused it to leap at the triumphs of freedom.


In taking this survey of the chief productions of Mr. Wirt's pen, I am tempted to pause for a moment, to express my regret

that the pursuits of his life had not been more decidedly applied to literary labors, than either circumstances or his own choice seem to have permitted. He was remarkably qualified by the character of his mind, and, I think I am warranted in saying, by his inclination, to attain great distinction in these pursuits. A career, in a larger degree, directed to this end would certainly have been not less honorable to himself, nor less useful to his country, and, I would fain persuade myself, not less profitable,—although the consideration of gain be but an unworthy stimulant to the glorious rewards which should interest the ambition of genius. He had, however, a large family around him who depended upon him for protection; and it may be that, surveying the sad history of the gifted spirits who have lighted the path of mankind with the lamps of their own minds and made their race rich with the treasures of wisdom and science, he has turned distrustfully from the yearnings of his ambition, and followed the broader and more certain track that led to professional fame and wealth. I can excuse him for the choice, whilst I lament over the dispensation

of human rule by which the latter pursuits should have such an advantage.

As a literary man he would have acquired a more permanent renown than the nature of professional occupation or the exercises of the forum are capable of conferring upon their votaries. The pen of genius erects its own everlasting monument; but the triumphs of the speaker's eloquence, vivid, brilliant and splendid as they are, live but in the history of their uncertain effects and in the intoxicating applause of the day:—to incredulous posterity they are a distrusted tradition, the extravagant boasting of an elder age prone by its nature to disparage the present by the narrated glories of the past.—So has it, even now, befallen the name of Patrick Henry, whom not all his affectionate biographer's learned zeal has rescued from the unbelieving smile of but a second generation. The glory of Cicero lives more conspicuously in his written philosophy than even in his speeches, which, although transmitted by his own elaborate and polished hand, may rather be assigned to his literary than to his forensic fame.

Mr. Wirt had many inducements to the cultivation of letters. He might have enter-





ed upon the field, in this country, almost without a rival. Our nation, young in the career of liberal arts, had but few names to reckon when asked, as she has sometimes been in derision, where were the evidences of her scholarship. Her pride would have pointed to a man like William Wirt with a peculiar complacency. His comprehensive and philosophical mind, acute and clear-sighted, was well adapted to master the truths of science: it was fruitful and imaginative and full of beautiful illustration. He had wit and humor of the highest flavor, combined with a quick and accurate observation of character: his taste, sensitive and refined, delighted in the harmony and truth of nature: his full memory furnished him abundant stores of learning: his style, rich and clear, like a fountain of sparkling waters played along a channel of golden sands and bright crystals and through meads begirt with flowers. Above all, the tendency of his mind was to usefulness: he indited no thought that did not serve to inculcate virtuous sentiments, noble pursuits, love of country, the value of generous and laudable ambition, trust in Heaven, or earnest attachment to duty. He has embel-

lished and vivified the grave experience of age with all the warm enthusiasm of youth, and has taught his countrymen the most severe and self-denying devotion to purposes of good, in lessons of so amiable a tone, as to win many a young champion to virtue by the kindness of his persuasion. His sketches of character are pleasantly graphic, and leave us room to believe that, either, in the drama or in that species of fictitious history which the great enchanter of this age has made so popular a vehicle for profound philosophy, he would have attained to an exalted fame. In short, there are but few amongst us who, in scholarship, learning, observation or facility and beauty of expression, may claim to be ranked with William Wirt.

His character as a lawyer is peculiarly entitled to commemoration on the present occasion. It is an admirable model for the contemplation of all professional aspirants. He was a careful, laborious and even painful student. Deeply versed in the principles and precedents of jurisprudence, his mind was copiously imbued with the auxiliary learning that enabled him to illustrate the abstruse lore of his profession. When he appeared at the

bar to try a cause, it was evident he felt that something more was at stake than the interest of the individual whose rights had been committed to his charge. His ample preparation, his solicitous devotion to the question before him, and his unblenching attention to the progress of the trial, showed that personal reputation and a zealous care to acquit himself in his great office to the satisfaction of his countrymen, no less swayed his endeavors than the trust his duty put upon him. The amenity of his manners, his good will, and the expression of affection and even of jocular companionship that played upon his massive features and lit up his clear and intelligent blue eye, evinced how much he felt that, in the necessary collisions and steady resistance of hard-fought debate, no burst of temper nor effusion of heated zeal should overmaster his equanimity or cause him, even for an instant, to forget the courtesies and kindnesses which he always held to be due to his brethren of the bar.

He was a powerful orator, and had the art to sway courts and juries with a master's spirit. The principal traits of his eloquence were great clearness and force in laying the

foundations of an argument, and the steady pursuit of it through the track of logical deduction. He was ingenious in choosing his position, and, that once taken, his hearers were borne to his conclusion upon a tide almost as irresistible as that which wafts the idle skiff upon the Potomac, downward from the mountains to the last cataract that meets the ebb and flood of the sea. In this train of earnest argumentation the attention of his auditory was kept alive by a vivid display of classic allusion, by flashes of wit and merriment, and by the familiar imagery which was called in aid to give point to his demonstrations, or light to what the subject rendered obscure to the common apprehension. He sometimes indulged in satire and invective, and, where the subject called for it, in stern denunciation. Many have felt with what indignant power these weapons have been wielded in his hand. His utterance, in early life, was said to have been confused and ungraceful. Practice had conquered these defects, and no man spoke with a more full, effortless and unobstructed fluency. His diction was scrupulously neat, and might have often deceived an audience into

the opinion that his speeches were prepared in the closet. His manner was remarkably impressive. Endowed with a commanding figure, a singularly graceful carriage and with a countenance of manly and thoughtful beauty, that struck an instant sense of respect into all that looked upon him, he was pre-eminent in that most significant trait of an orator, action. We can all remember the rich and flowing music of that voice which was wont to stir the inmost souls of our tribunals and bring down the loud applause of delighted bystanders; the dignity with which we have seen his majestic person dilate itself before the judgment seat; the ineffable grace that beamed upon the broad expanse of his brow, and the kindled transport of his fine face, in those rapt moments when his mind was all in a blaze with the inspirations of his own eloquence. These were the rare gifts that imparted a charm to his oratory, which often wrought more powerfully for the success of his cause than even the efficacy of "right words set in order."

Few men have passed through life with so little lingering hostility against them as he. High place and broad repute engendered no


envy amongst his compeers, nor excited jealous feeling. Various and complicated connections with society, with all their inevitable motives to conflict with individuals, seem to have been borne by him, without raising a harsh surmise, or even a momentary provocation amongst the many who have been destined to feel the weight of his overwhelming talents. There predominated in his character a profound and acute sense of lofty honor—that honor which disdains an unjust thought as much as a disgraceful act; and all who knew him felt that they might repose with unwatchful faith in his severe and unalterable integrity. This trait rose above all others in his professional relations and made him, what all acknowledged him to be, the head and ornament of a brotherhood whose most precious attribute and greatest glory consist in the scrupulous fidelity with which they discharge the most important and honorable trusts to society.

It was his fortune to be entrusted, both in his official capacity as the law officer of the government, and afterwards as a private pleader in the Supreme Court of the United States, with the conduct of some of the most impor-

tant controversies that ever interested the jurisprudence of a free country. There is no moral eminence amongst the dwellers upon earth more commanding or dignified than that upon which, on such occasions, the learned and upright lawyer was placed by the great functions assigned to him. He stood before a tribunal around whose name and power were clustered the affections of the American people—the high and holy sanctuary of the liberties of a free republic. He spoke in the presence of judges carefully culled from the learned and virtuous men of the nation, and set apart from the people as a civic priesthood, into whose minds no profane thought of power or of ambition might ever lawfully enter—men whose lives were consecrated by peculiar dedication and solemn devotion to that highest and most arduous exercise of intellect, the expounding of the sober oracles of law. Chief, amongst these sat one, over whose manly form age had thrown its venerable tracery without marring its proportions, and upon whose intellectual forehead the storms that have lashed up the passions of contending parties and rocked the very battlements of the republic itself, have broken

in exhausted fury, without ever shaking the equipoise of its own unmatched and unerring judgment, or dimming the fair sunshine of its serene front—a sage who, through many a day of popular frenzy, has calmly looked down from his lofty seat upon the jarring people, and spoke the troubled waters into peace,—and gave smooth seas again to the noble ship of state. Before such a tribunal did the advocate appear to discuss and settle the doctrines of great constitutional and international law; to stay the erring arm of power; to defend the weak and oppressed citizen, and to invoke the sturdy genius of American liberty to the rescue of the enthralled and humble victim of injustice.—Most gallantly and nobly did he then sustain the hopes that were confided to him, and richly did he there win the imperishable garland of his fame!

So exclusively was he addicted to the pursuit of professional duty that, as I have before remarked, there were no allurements of political renown, though presented to him with every circumstance to attract his ambition, that could seduce him from his allotted path. He possessed qualities that would have placed him foremost amongst the most admired of





our senates. His attainments, though adorned with an unusual stock of the beautiful in human knowledge, were also abundant in the solid and useful things of life. His habits were those of calm and sifting deliberation: his temper was "neither splenetic nor rash," but gentle, just and considerate; and his eloquence was more happily adapted to the moving of great minds and swaying the purposes of state, than even to the keen encounters of the bar. His integrity was of that scrupulous and self-denying kind that would have won the confidence of all parties, and commanded the respect of the most inveterate opponents. Yet so apparelled in virtues which may be deemed the rare jewels of honest statesmanship, he put by the hopes to which they might have pointed him, and pursued to the last the consistent aim of his first ambition.

It is no exception to this remark that in the last presidential canvass he consented to allow his name to be presented to the citizens of the United States as a candidate for the chief magistracy of the Union. The nomination was made by a convention of delegates from a highly respectable portion of our fel-

low citizens. As it was unsought by Mr. Wirt so was it equally unexpected.—In his interpretation of the theory of our Government, the chief executive officer of the republic is a station too august to be made the subject of individual solicitation, and, for the same reason, its functions are too important to the common welfare to allow a patriot citizen to decline them, when the wishes of the people invite him to take the public suffrage. This in Mr. Wirt was a genuine, unaffected sentiment, and it was therefore with a sense of duty, almost invested with the sanctity of a religious obligation, that he signified his acceptance of the nomination. From my own knowledge of his feelings, on this occasion, I can most conscientiously affirm my belief, that, in yielding to the request of the convention, he felt that secret conviction of a painful sacrifice of comfort and tranquility which every good man feels when constrained by the call of patriotism to devote his mind, his fortune or his life in arduous achievement for his country's good. As it was in this spirit that he accepted the nomination, so did he, in the same spirit, await the issue of the trial. Never did patriot of

Rome or Greece, nor earnest champion, not less worthy, of our own early freedom, give himself to his country with a purer heart than did the distinguished man of whom we speak, on the occasion I have referred to; and not amongst the thousands of his friends was there one who received the tidings of his defeat with a calmer mind than he, or with so slight regret. It is grateful, in these days to summon up to our contemplation the character of such a man;—in these days, when bitter experience has instructed us to distrust all who hold the high seats of power; when the common profligacy of the selfish and venal politician has thrown the taint of a general suspicion over all who bear the appellation of public servants; when the frequent treachery of the successful demagogue has too often taught us to treat as mockery the professions of patriotism, and when the boasted virtue which our forefathers pronounced vital to republicanism has almost become a mere name of delusion,—it is a pleasant thing to cast our thoughts upon the pure footsteps of such a man as Wirt, and to witness the amiable renown which has encircled his unobtrusive career. It teaches us that

the love of homely and old fashioned worth is not obliterated from the hearts of our countrymen, and that, in the great multitude of our people, there is yet a solid mass of right thinking and plain dealing men. To that firm phalanx of patriots, in our hour of extremest need, should disaster ever fall upon our luxuriant and proud over-arching shelter of liberty, we may appeal in the language of the poet—

**"O save our country,—save a nation,  
The chosen land, the last retreat of freedom,  
Amidst a broken world; cast back thy view  
And trace from farthest times her old renown.  
Think of the blood that to maintain her rights  
And nurse her sheltering laws, hath flow'd in battle.**

Think what cares,  
What vigilance, what toils, what bright contention  
In councils, camps and well-disputed senates,  
It cost our generous ancestors, to raise  
A matchless plan of freedom; whence we shine  
The happiest of mankind, the first of nations."

The character of Mr. Wirt, as exhibited in private life, was most attractive. He was an attentive and affectionate father, husband and friend: indulgent to the faults of others, severe to his own; sincere, generous and affable. He possessed, in a remarkable degree, that trait which has been called simplicity of

heart,—it was single-mindedness, straight forward candor. His manners had the wayward playfulness of a boy, that won upon and infected with their own buoyancy every class of his associates, from the youngest to the oldest—from the humblest retainer about his person, or casual stranger, to the most eminent and most intimate. I have seen him at the close of a day of toil in the studies and duties of his profession, join a herd of school-boys with a spirit as full of pranks as the lightest truant amongst them. I have seen him amongst the elders of the land and in the group of the highest functionaries and gravest sages, throw around him the full influence of his dignified and graceful presence, until it seemed to raise and illumine the bearing and behavior even of that society.

Lastly, he was a zealous and faithful christian. In such a mind as his, so inquiring, so masterly, so discriminating, religion was the child of his judgment, not the creation of his passion. It was an earnest, abiding sense of truth, and showed itself in daily exercise and constant acknowledgment. With the sublime system of revelation resting ever in his thoughts, the christian law hung like a tablet

upon his breast, and duty ever pointed her finger to the sculptured commands that were graven there to serve him as a manual of practice. He loved old forms and old opinions, and, with something like a patriarch's reverence, he headed his little family flock on their Sunday walks to church: morning and evening he gathered them together and, on bended knee, invoked his Father's blessing on his household; and at the daily meal bowed his calm and prophet-like figure over the family repast, to ask that grace of the Deity, on which his heart rested with its liveliest hope, and to express that thankfulness which filled and engrossed his soul.—Such was this man in the retirement of his domestic hearth, and thus did his affections, in that little precinct, bloom with the daily increasing virtues of love of family, of friends, of his country and of his God.

As he lived so did he die, giving lessons and examples of good, even to his latest breath;—the same composed, thoughtful, cheerful and fearless man when treading on the brink of time, as when careering midway upon his pilgrimage, elate with hope and confident of power.—But he is gone! The

silver cord is loosed, the golden bowl is broken, the pitcher is broken at the fountain, and the wheel is broken at the cistern.

“Yea, he hath finished!

For him there is no longer any future;  
His life is bright—bright without spot it was,  
And cannot cease to be. No ominous hour  
Knocks at his door with tidings of mishap.  
Far off is he, above desire and fear,  
No more submitted to the change and chance  
Of the unsteady planets.”

Long, it may be, before this community shall “look upon his like again.”

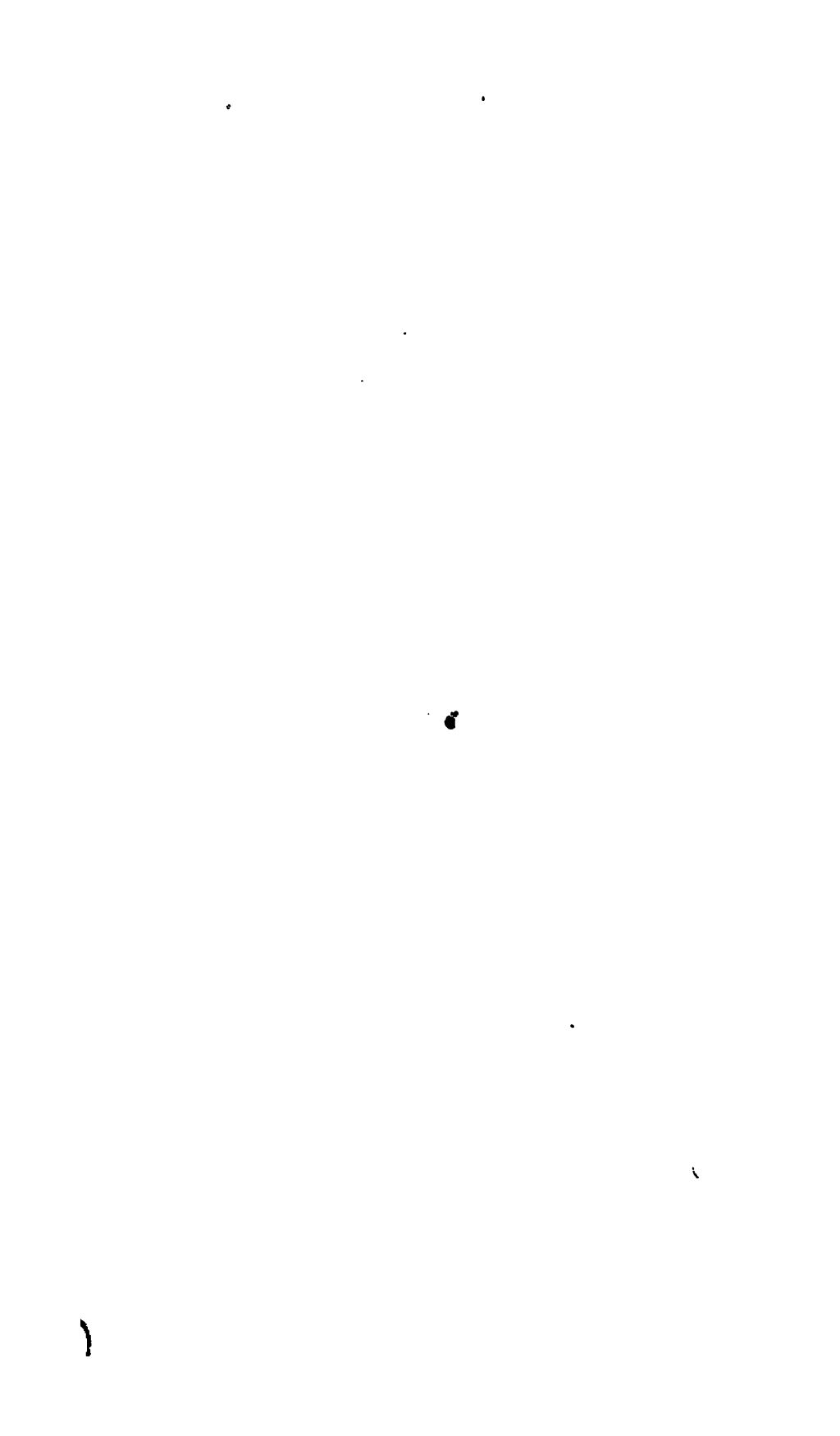
It has been our unhappy destiny to witness at this bar, within the short space of some ten years gone, the extinguishment of many brilliant lights. One by one, the stars of our renown have sunk into the great Western sea, from which, to our eyes, they never shall again emerge. The fires of Martin, Harper, Pinckney, Winder and Wirt, have all been quenched in that vast flood; and with their departed radiance has gone many a proud boast of Maryland. These were names, in their day, to call up the robust glory of our little state and to seat it beside the worthiest in the realms of intellect. Though these gifted children of our circumscribed soil have

glided from amongst us, and now, in solemn succession, walk with solitary and noiseless step the dark valley of the shadow of death, yet still do they live with us in a green and fond memory, and speak in the yet lingering echoes of their living voices—speak wisdom and hope and encouragement to the present race. They beckon the youth of our times towards the path they trod, and point to the glorious rewards that hang within the reach of “midnight labor and holy emulation.”













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